



**People  
& Clubs**

**Development Plan**



Foundation



# Foreword

The Irish FA Foundation is on track to achieving its ambitious 10-year target associated with the Let Them Play strategy. It is vitally important for the continued success of this strategy that the wider football infrastructure has both the capacity and capability to be able to thrive with the anticipated growth in player numbers.



Findings from consultations with clubs from the adult amateur game have also highlighted that people and clubs within the game need support to be able to deliver the best experience to those playing, with a focus on helping to grow football outside of our top three divisions.

The world has changed dramatically and the competition for people's time has become a marketplace. If football is to stay relevant to young people it needs to offer an opportunity that both allows players to reach their potential within the game, but also that those served by the game have the best possible experience whatever their age, background and ability.

If we are to build lifelong involvement within football the key environment is the club and the people who make the club happen.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Boyd'.

**Michael Boyd**

Director of Football Development  
Irish FA Foundation



# Why a bespoke development plan for people and clubs?

Clubs and the people who run them are the key element of grassroots football. Within Northern Ireland we have more than 700 clubs and over 7000 volunteers contributing daily to football.

A club is more than just the players on the pitch. It is all those individuals who have given their time, passion and expertise to create the opportunities for people, whatever their ability to play the game.

At present our 7,000+ volunteers are giving on average five to six hours per week, valued at £104 million to the Northern Ireland economy, based on the UEFA Grow Social Return on Investment model.

As the governing body our role is to make volunteering in football as attractive as possible as well as making it easy for those involved in delivering football to realise their ambitions within the game.

We recognise the huge contribution grassroots clubs make to the development of the sport. This plan and its implementation are designed to support clubs to provide the best possible experience for players and volunteers alike.







# Strategic Context

## Where does this work fit into wider landscape?

### Irish FA

- Creating a healthy domestic game at all levels – intermediate, junior, women’s, boys, schools, futsal and disability.
- Reaching beyond the game, using the power of football for health, education and social development
- Building a culture of lifelong participation in football

### Sport NI

- A world class start and lifelong involvement in sport and physical recreation for all people
- A sustainable sporting and physical recreation culture that contributes to broader government objectives

### UEFA

- Grow participation, especially among girls
- Design, develop and deliver specific coach education
- Enhanced club and volunteer development
- Promoting equality at grassroots level

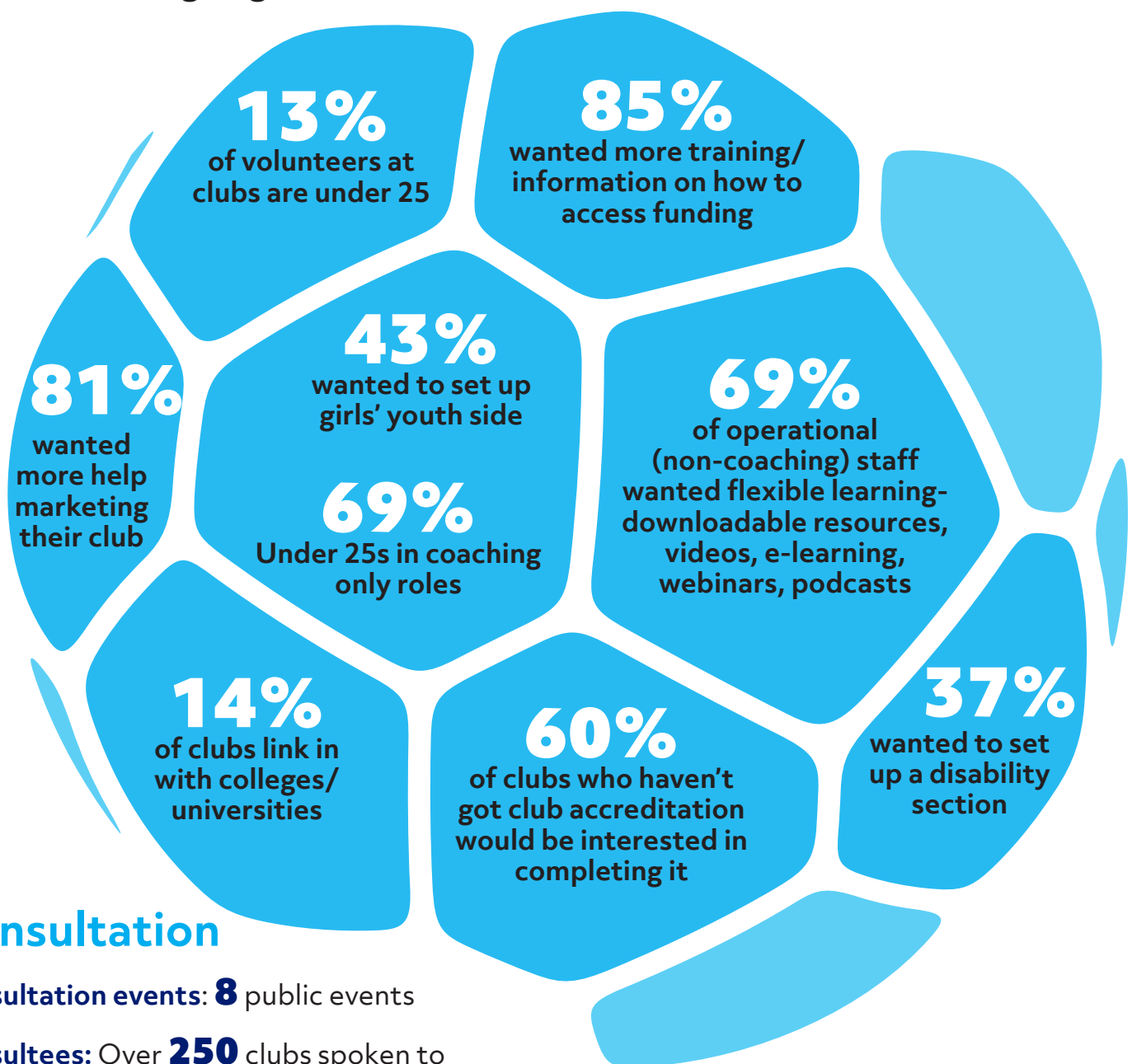


# Where are we now?

## Football in NI

Clubs: circa **700** • Volunteers: circa **7000**

Players: Average age of volunteer: 35-44



## Consultation

Consultation events: **8** public events

Consultees: Over **250** clubs spoken to

Online survey: **724** respondents

Other organisations spoken to including universities, colleges, volunteer organisations, charities, other football associations, councils, other sports: **39**

# What have we learned?

## The Consultation

This development plan has been underpinned by an extensive consultation process.

The process was designed so the plan and its outputs accurately reflect the views and aspirations of clubs. The plan also considers the views of wider organisations that support clubs including Sport NI, council sports development teams, activity providers, universities and the Department for Communities as well as the Irish FA Foundation staff who will play a role in its implementation.

Views have also been sought from other associations around the world to gather best practice, common themes and new ideas.

The consultation process included:

- Face to face consultations
- Individual interviews
- Online surveys
- Focus group discussions

The range of partners included:

- Clubs
- Leagues
- Volunteer organisations
- Local councils
- Irish FA staff
- Universities
- Department for Communities
- Government bodies (Sport NI and DSNI)
- Other football associations
- Other sports



# What have we found out?

## People

People give their time to football for many reasons. Our research showed this was primarily due to a love for the game and to help their club. This was combined with an opportunity to utilise their wider skills to give something back to the game.

There was also a strong desire to learn new skills, develop existing skills as well as the social elements of being part of a club and interacting with other like-minded people.


Most people involved in the game were giving five to six hours per week to their club. However, this peaked at 16 hours, with a large number giving more than 10 hours per week.

The people involved in our clubs undertake many different roles including coaching, administration, maintenance and many smaller jobs. The age profile showed that younger people are far more likely to be involved in coaching with the balance only changing to administration-based roles after the age of 55.

Those who were not involved or had recently finished volunteering quoted a lack of time and other commitments as their primary reason.







The areas where people stated they would like further support were focused around the themes of:

- **Funding opportunities** - learning where to find grants and other sources of funding as well as how best to apply.
- **Club development** - including writing development plans, engaging stakeholders and forging better and more meaningful community links.
- **Coach development** - including coach mentoring, developing a coaching philosophy, informal learning and how to develop players
- **Personal development** - this included developing existing skills and learning new skills

People wanted a mixed approach on how education, masterclasses, workshops and guidance could be delivered. There was a preference towards face to face opportunities. However, for guidance and more modular based elements, technology solutions were favoured with a preference towards e-learning, downloadable resources and online guides.

There was also a strong drive towards the more informal in terms of learning. This was coupled with a desire for opportunities to be delivered locally to clubs where possible.

## People Recruitment & Development

People were largely recruited through informal mechanisms primarily through word of mouth or as a parent of a youth player.

People development within clubs was largely based on the more formal education programmes from the Irish FA which were predominantly coaching courses. These were interspersed with less formal coach mentoring. There was also evidence of in-house training for people within clubs and this ranged from mentoring with more experienced club members through to informal workshops and some external formal courses.

Roles based around fundraising, marketing and finance as well as the traditional roles of treasurer, chair and secretary were also highlighted as those where education, training and resources could benefit clubs. Club people felt that it was wrongly assumed that those coming into those roles knew how to undertake them and that some training on the role, expectations, good practice and FAQs would be warmly welcomed. People favoured an online solution to these training needs.





## Clubs


Positively, the feedback from the majority of clubs with youth sections consulted was that there was a real appetite for growth, particularly around the establishment of girls', women's and disability sections.



In order to facilitate growth and for the maintenance of the current levels of participation, clubs identified facilities, funding, coach development, marketing, community links, learning the landscape and mental health as key areas where support would be welcomed and valuable.

There was a strong desire by some clubs to be not just a football provider, but to be a community hub that not only offered the opportunity to play football but also improved lives in its community. The strong, almost universal desire to receive training around mental health showed this willingness to be more than just a club that put teams out on the field.

Marketing became a blanket term to encompass everything from social media through to community links with key partners and is an area where clubs would value support. While there were strong links to schools and community groups, colleges and universities were less well known.



Key areas for support were identified across clubs, partners and other organisations as;

- Coaching – mentoring, masterclasses, qualifications and resources
- Club administration – role specific training
- Safeguarding
- Mental health
- Funding guides
- Working with parents
- Marketing and communications
- Developing community links

The methods of delivery thought most useful were identified as:

- Localised training
- Best practice case studies
- Online guides and e-learning
- 'How to' packs
- Online resources
- Larger course variety

## Accreditation

Club accreditation was viewed positively by clubs as being a worthwhile task. However, there was a mix of opinion on how easy a process it was to undertake.

Other feedback on club accreditation described the existing process as being time consuming, lacking sufficient support, having few tangible benefits and a lack of prestige and reward when completed. Most people wanted a way to complete the process online rather than through physical folders.

While the importance of club accreditation was understood, making the process easier, more supportive and attractive to clubs was largely agreed. A more tangible and prestigious recognition and incentive programme linked to accreditation would also make the process more valuable to clubs.



# What are we going to do?

Based on the consultation our initial interventions fall into three sections:

## Club Development

## Club Operations

## People Development

All of these will be supported through a more robust communication framework between the Irish FA and clubs.

## Communications

The Irish FA Foundation will communicate with clubs regularly through central staff, local staff and online. This framework and service charter will be clearly articulated with an escalation policy and as a minimum standard this will include:

- Monthly e-zine
- Regional hub courses
- Club education courses
- Coach education courses
- Funding opportunities
- Any other relevant information
- The development of an online portal for clubs
- Case studies of good practice
- Fit for purpose, easy to navigate website and web tools
- Events





# People Development

## People and Clubs Courses

The Irish FA Foundation will produce a range of courses, guidance notes, video guides and case studies across a range of topics including:

- Club marketing and social media
- Funding
- Customer experience
- Stakeholder engagement
- Commercial development
- Podcasts
- Research and development
- How to work with parents in football

These will be free of charge and available through the Regional Hub or online portal.

## National Youth Council

The Irish FA Foundation will establish a National Youth Council feeding into the Irish FA Foundation to gain the views and experiences of young people within football to:

- Shape Irish FA programmes to keep football relevant
- Support succession planning
- Recruit more young people into playing and volunteering
- Support insight generation into the youth market





Over time the Irish FA Foundation in conjunction with education and football partners will develop a series of opportunities for young people focusing on:

- Skills and employability
- Football qualifications
- Practical experience
- Industry placements
- Study visits

## Club Development

### People and Clubs – Club Accreditation

The Irish IFA Foundation will reinvigorate and rebrand club accreditation which will be more relevant, useful, easier to complete and aimed at opening up opportunities for clubs.

This will be clearly articulated with:

- Purpose
- Benefits
- Recognition
- Ongoing support

This will also evolve to ensure it is both fit for purpose for clubs and the Irish FA as well as meet criteria for Sport NI to ensure clubs are able to access wider benefits.





# Club Operations

## People and Clubs Operations Manual

The Irish FA Foundation will produce a series of operational guides, templates, processes and resources based on best practice in club operations to initially include:

- Club operations
- Marketing and social media
- Volunteer resources
- Recruitment
- Succession planning
- Safeguarding

This will be housed in a series of downloadable (accreditation approved) documents online and linked to the work of Regional Football Community Hubs.



# Our Approach

The Irish FA Foundation will ensure that our approach is fundamentally based on making life easier for clubs and people.

Where possible and appropriate we will:

- Utilise technology
- Utilise the Regional Football Community Hubs
- Be club and people centred
- Be accessible

We will constantly seek feedback on both our approach and interventions and will listen to and act on the feedback to make our support processes more robust, valuable and easier to access for clubs.

While these initiatives will be implemented immediately, the process is one of continual development and evolution. These initiatives will lead to the further development of resources, guides and direct support to ensure clubs have the best possible chance of being successful.





# What does 2020 look like?

The emergence of a culture of club and people development throughout football

A growing club culture utilising a range of tools, resources, guides and training opportunities designed to be the foundation for a network of growing and thriving clubs.

This network will be supported by a proactive culture within the Irish FA that is bold enough to try things and humble enough to listen.



# Regional Football Community Hubs



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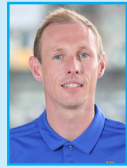
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